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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000191

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/17
TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPAO PHUM SO DJ

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: LAST UNDECIDED RULING COALITION PARTNER SUPPORTS GUELLEH FOR THIRD TERM

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 1417; 09 DJIBOUTI 1405; 10 DJIBOUTI 129

CLASSIFIED BY: J. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. President Guelleh's last undecided and undisputedly most important ruling coalition partner has declared its support for a constitutional amendment allowing him to run for a third term in office in 2011. Yet while the FRUD ("Front for the Restoration of Democracy and Unity") did throw its weight behind a third mandate, its endorsement was not unconditional. The ethnic-Afar, former armed opposition group--widely recognized as a legitimate national political voice and an important counterweight to the President's own party-- also voiced criticism toward some aspects of Guelleh's administration, called for a rebalancing of representation between the two parties, and demanded that any constitutional amendment be submitted to the people in a referendum. While disagreements over strategy and policy may well still simmer among some FRUD members, the party has now officially adopted and promulgated its core positions. With the FRUD's public stance declared, inter- and intraparty discussions will now turn towards the mechanics of a constitutional amendment, including the crucial decision of whether it will be voted on by the full population, or by the National Assembly. END SUMMARY.

FRUD: YES TO CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION--

BUT MUST BE BY NATIONAL REFERENDUM

¶2. (SBU) The FRUD held a two-day national party convention February 10-11 at the People's Palace, Djibouti's flagship public conference center. The event was well-attended, not just by FRUD leaders and members, but by a full complement of representatives from the partner ruling coalition parties of the UMP ("Union for a Presidential Majority"). Amidst regular party business and displays of traditional music and dancing, the two most carefully-watched components of the convention were the keynote speech of FRUD party president Ali Mohamed Daoud ("Jean-Marie"), and the formal adoption of seven resolutions by the convention attendees.

¶3. (SBU) In his speech, Daoud focused on both regional and national questions. Domestically, he criticized slow progress on decentralization and democratic growth. He nevertheless praised President Guelleh for several important achievements, and noted that the FRUD--not being in a position to present its own candidate for 2011 presidential elections and seeing no other viable alternatives--would support a constitutional amendment allowing Guelleh to run for a third term in office. Regionally, Daoud

addressed the threats of piracy and instability in Somalia, as well the ongoing Djibouti-Eritrea border dispute. Notably, he criticized the GODJ's commitment to contribute troops to AMISOM as "counterproductive," and without precedent.

14. (SBU) The FRUD convention closed with the adoption of seven resolutions:

--Resolution One: Calls for "further action by President Guelleh in the context of a third mandate," while noting that the constitutional revision needed to allow for a third term should be "submitted to the people's votes by referendum."

--Resolution Two: Calls for a new agreement between the FRUD and the President's RPP (People's Rally for Progress) party to replace the outdated 1994 agreement ending the civil conflicts of that decade. Proposes a "Charter of Alliance" between coalition allies, with appropriate coordination and monitoring mechanisms.

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--Resolution Three: Calls for FRUD leaders to "quickly correct" imbalances in representation between the FRUD and the RPP.

--Resolution Four: (Administrative resolution on time frame for implementing resolutions)

--Resolution Five (SOMALIA): Takes note of the situation in Somalia, supports the Djibouti Peace Process, and "approves of the President of the FRUD's analysis" of the situation in Somalia. (COMMENT. Without expressly stating opposition to the GODJ's plan to contribute troops to AMISOM, this resolution de facto endorses FRUD President Daoud's criticism of that decision. END COMMENT).

--Resolution Six (ERITREA): Condemns Eritrea's actions and calls for applying sanctions against Eritrea.

--Resolution Seven (PALESTINIAN PEOPLE): Expresses solidarity with the Palestinian people. Calls on the international community, and in particular the United States, to push Israel to comply with applicable United Nations resolutions.

15. (SBU) Treatment of the FRUD convention in state-owned media, including the French-language newspaper "La Nation," included unusually direct coverage of the FRUD's criticisms of the government. One story printed all seven FRUD resolutions, while an initial piece summarized Daoud's keynote speech. Covered topics included Daoud's characterization of Djibouti's decentralization process as "embryonic and fragile," as well as his statements that Djiboutian democracy had not fully "responded to the hopes nourished by our compatriots" and that election methods did not allow for full representation and "political alternation." This relatively open coverage was framed by a headline that focused on the FRUD's endorsement of a constitutional amendment: "FRUD says yes to a revision of the constitution, demands a referendum."

16. (C) As the FRUD leadership publicly declared support for a third term for Guelleh, private gossip in Djibouti City focused on remaining divisions among the FRUD rank-and-file. Postings on at

least one opposition website (the "Association for the Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti") painted FRUD President Daoud as a traitor to his supporters and people. (COMMENT. There is still some level of dissent among FRUD members--or more broadly, within the FRUD's ethnic-Afar constituency. However, Djibouti's intensively consultative decision-making protocols make it highly unlikely that top FRUD leadership would take so public a stance without having first gathered sufficient support through lengthy informal discussions within the party. Likewise, although details on which party gets what likely remain somewhat fluid, the FRUD's basic support for a third mandate (ref A) was clearly carefully negotiated with the RPP in advance. END COMMENT).

DISSENTING VOICES ISOLATED, BUT ACTIVE

¶ 17. (SBU) PND ("National Democratic Party") President Aden Robleh Awaleh--now the only ruling coalition partner to have publicly rejected a constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in office (ref B)--attended and spoke at the FRUD convention. His speech reportedly focused on the historical roles of the PND and the FRUD as lead agents in the fight for democracy in Djibouti, and on the cooperative links between the two groups. The PND newsletter "La Republique" continues to appear biweekly, and a February 11 edition invited "human rights activists, union leaders, and political leaders" to contribute their thoughts for a page dedicated to readers' opinions.

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¶ 18. (SBU) None of the members of the three-party opposition grouping UAD ("Union for a Democratic Alternation") attended the FRUD convention. In a press release posted to opposition websites on February 10 (the opening day of the FRUD convention), UAD member ARD ("Republican Alliance for Democracy") Secretary General Kassim Ali Dini announced that the ARD will hold a party assembly on February 25-26 in Djibouti City's Balbala neighborhood. The ARD, which counts former members of the armed wing of the FRUD, represents a heavily ethnic-Afar constituency.

NEXT STEPS: REVISION BY REFERENDUM?

¶ 19. (C) COMMENT. After the FRUD's announcement of support for a constitutional revision, many are expecting President Guelleh to break his long public silence and officially announce a third run during a planned March 4 RPP Central Committee meeting. However, if the question of proposing a constitutional amendment appears largely settled, the question of how to do so is still very much up in the air. The FRUD has now publicly demanded a referendum; and in the past senior GODJ officials have told Ambassador that they too were in favor of a plebiscite. Nevertheless, the constitution allows the President to decide whether to approve amendments via a majority vote in both the National Assembly and in a referendum--or instead, by two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Minister of the Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh recently told Ambassador that the RPP's Central Committee would urge President Guelleh to choose the National Assembly route (ref C). On February 10, Minister Bouh told visiting Director of the National Defense University's Africa Center for Strategic Studies Ambassador Bellamy and EmbOffs that the financial and personnel costs of organizing a referendum in such close proximity to the 2011 presidential and regional elections should also be taken into account. As key GODJ decision

makers continue to negotiate toward a constitutional revision, Post will again reinforce the message that free, fair, and transparent elections--and election preparations--are in everybody's interest.

END COMMENT.

SWAN